

**COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM**  
**CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN**



**NEWS RELEASE**

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**Davis Welcomes Data on Visa Backlog Impact**

*Government Reform Held Hearing on Visa Problems Last Summer*

**Washington, D.C.** -- House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) today welcomed the work of eight U.S. trade associations to document the adverse impact of U.S. visa policies on American economic competitiveness.

A report done by The Santangelo Group on behalf of eight trade associations concluded that U.S. businesses suffered losses of \$30 billion in the period from July 2002 to March 2004, due to the delays caused by current U.S. visa policy.

"For the first time, we have data to quantify the impacts of our visa backlog," Davis said. "According to this report, American companies that do business internationally have lost \$30 billion over the past two years due to delays caused by current U.S. visa policy. Thirty *billion* – that is a stunning figure."

Davis stressed that the need to be vigilant in protecting the security of Americans remains paramount.

"We all agree that homeland security is our top priority, and that as a result of September 11<sup>th</sup>, we need to closely scrutinize visitors to our country, but we also need to see if there are ways that, without sacrificing security, we can mitigate delays that impede legitimate business and tourist travel," Davis said.

The eight trade groups who commissioned the study are: the U.S.-China Business Council, the U.S.-Russia Business Council, the U.S.-Vietnam Trade Council, the Aerospace Industries Association, the American Council on International Personnel, the Association for Manufacturing Technology, the Coalition for Employment Through Exports, and the National Foreign Trade Council.

Changes in the handling of business visa applications, first noticed in the summer of 2002, have led to long delays and unexplained denials whose impact has been heavy among U.S. companies seeking to bring customers or foreign employees to the United States for important company work. The visa backlog has damaged exporting opportunities for U.S. corporations because many of their foreign trading partners have been prevented from entering the U.S. to inspect the products. Foreign participation in trade shows and international business conferences, key sites for development of U.S. business opportunities, has also been seriously affected

Davis is supportive of the goals of the trade groups to reduce the visa delays that are hurting American competitiveness. Among them:

- The goal for visa processing should be 48 hours, with a maximum limit of 30 days
- Consular posts should provide greater transparency to U.S. companies.
- A "Gold Card" program would facilitate visa applications, preventing redundancies and averting problems before they arise.
- Continued integration of government databases is essential.
- Multiple-entry, longer duration visas would lessen consular workloads.
- Consular posts should allow interviews to be scheduled over the Internet.
- Congress should exercise its oversight authority to ensure improvements in consular services.

The House Government Reform Committee held a hearing on the malfunctioning visa system in July 2003. Administration officials at the hearing pledged to improve the efficiency of the multi-agency visa review process, reduce waiting times, and eliminate arbitrary or unexplained visa decisions, while maintaining the security of U.S. borders.

“We have come a long way in modernizing the visa issuance process and improving security standards. Now we need to leverage our technology and know-how to promote legitimate travel that meets the needs of business and tourism,” Davis said.

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